



IS THERE A NEW PIRACY HRA?

First it was the Gulf of Aden, next it was the Gulf of Guinea (1). There has been a major shift in the location of pirate attacks over the last couple of years. But now, are we about to witness a very different shift?

The latest growth of pirate insurgency? Latin America.

It's an area unfamiliar with pirate attacks, and as a result of this is underprepared for what seems to be an influx of piracy. Since the start of 2018, Latin America has featured almost weekly in the list of pirate attacks taking place across the globe. It recently started with brutally violent attacks on local fisherman and has now evolved to target commercial vessels.

To better understand why this is taking place one should consider both where the attacks are taking place and what we need to do to prevent and combat them, but also question why they are taking place, who is funding them and what is the objective. Once the industry is armed with the information to answer these questions, they will be able to react in a way that will prevent piracy indefinitely.

As reported in the ARX Bi-Annual 2018 Risk Review (covering from June 2017 to January 2018) In Middle and South America robbers boarded at least 14 merchant vessels and a total of 17 piracy related incidents occurred. In nearly all of the successful boarding, ship property was stolen and vessel were left damaged. In one of the more serious incidents a watchman was tied up and taken hostage by five robbers in Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela. A similar incident occurred just a week later, where two watchmen were tied up by pirates in the same port.

Unlike in any of the other regions previously described, pirates almost exclusively targeted vessels under anchor in Middle and South America. Piracy hotspots in the region are Puerto La Cruz Anchorage and Puerto Jose Anchorage, Venezuela, where three incidents each occurred and Cartega Inner Anchorage and Mamonal Anchorage in Columbia, where a combined four incidents occurred.

A significant increase in piracy often leads to that region being redefined as a "high risk area" (HRA) But up until now Latin America has seen very little incidents related to piracy, so with such a limited level of information relating to piracy in the region, is it too soon to label it as such? An Oceans Beyond Piracy (OBP) report determines that this lack of information would make it hard to predict a pattern of piracy in the region, resulting in ambiguity as to whether this should be perceived as a one-off period of piracy, or recognized as an increasing concern for all maritime companies transiting the region.

In 2016 OBP produced their first report looking at South America, Caribbean and Latin America (2), including an overview of this region, but other organisations such as the Caribbean Safety and

Security Net have also noted an increase in attacks there in recent years, specifically on yachts. (3) As with many areas where pirates operate, the group highlighted the reluctance for companies to admit they have fallen victim to a pirate attack. Findings suggest that incidents often go unreported in the Caribbean "for reasons of privacy, embarrassment, or fears of economic repercussions" (4). The report may be outdated in terms of publication date, but the findings bring early warning signs that not enough is currently being done to monitor areas of growing concern.

ARX Maritime publish a weekly OpenBridge risk report, detailing the incidents on land and sea that could influence piracy levels in regions

across the world. Over the past few weeks there has been a stark difference in the type of incidents occurring in the region. These changes are evident in the level of violence used in attacks in the region, but also in their apparent tactics to build a strong attacking force.

Attacks have grown more structured as time goes on. One of the first attacks in the region this year was an attack in Cabo de la Vela, Colombia, on the 3rd April 03rd, A dinghy and an outboard motor were stolen from an anchored sailing yacht and (5) . The next was off Curacao, on the 8th April, two outboard

motors were stolen from two different boats (6).

Almost a week later the intensity of attacks increased from basic theft to attacks using weapons. In Laguna de Términos, Mexico, on the 7th April there were two incidents where men, armed with weapons, stripped fishermen of their outboard motors, fishing nets, fishing catch, radios, cell phones and cash, then beat them if they resisted and left them stranded at sea (7). An attack of equal severity took place on the 27th April off Suriname. A group of suspected Guyana pirates attacked 20 fishermen in four boats with machetes. They tied the men's legs with weights and then forced them to jump overboard. Four managed to swim to shore but 16 are still missing presumed dead (8)

Then As recently as the 5th May, in Callao Anchorage, Peru, three robbers in a wooden boat boarded an anchored bulk carrier. After the alarm was raised they escaped with the ship's stolen stores (9). In Puerto Jose Anchorage, Venezuela, on the 28th April, a crew member was completing routine rounds onboard an anchored bulk carrier when he saw robbers trying to access the vessel via the hawse pipe and raised the alarm. Seeing the alerted crew, the robbers escaped empty handed (10). Finally, another attack off Suriname happened on the 2nd May. Pirates attacked a fishing ship, killing at least one fisherman.(11).

Over the past 3 weeks all boarding's have been successful, the assailants have built up a supply of outboards and weapon systems and as mentioned earlier in the report this could correlate with an increase in confidence. Currently there are limited Combined Maritime Forces in the area. Recently the EU Naval Force (EU NAVFOR), in cooperation with the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)(12), launched a large scale

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region but this hasn't spread across to Latin America. Latin America shares similarities with other piracy hotspots but up until now attacks have been less frequent, meaning the region receives less attention. However, with the deepening socio-economic problems many of its countries face, piracy is likely to escalate. There are some encouraging developments, such as Colombia's efforts to end its civil war, but a cautious eye should be cast when passing through the area's coastal waters.

IHS Markit Data Analyst, Devlin McStay published a report called, "South America's piracy potential". In this he explains that areas prone to piracy suffer with a lack of opportunity, education, and equality. West Africa is rife with conflict, corruption, and crippling poverty. Colombia shares many of these social and economic problems, but is more stable and has a higher level of education. This could be why the incidents in west Africa are more violent than those in South America.

He then went on to say Venezuela ranks alongside Haiti as one of the most dangerous countries in South America and the Caribbean, according to IHS Country Risk. Venezuela's oil and gas sector is a primary wealth generator, along with manufacturing, telecommunications, and mining. However, concerns about nationalisation continue to undermine external investment, resulting in a weak employment market.

In summary, keep your ears pinned back and your eyes open, using all available intelligence, analysts will point to the fact that the trend will grow in numbers, local pirates are well armed and after successful attacks their moral will be high. Local and political instability makes piracy more appealing to locals, which means that the CMF actions may have to quickly adapt to the Latin America trade. Shipping owners and managers trading in the area now face the decision of how they respond to the new threat, whilst the laws governing private maritime security companies need to be clearly communicated.

If you would like an in-dept report into specific ports or analysis into the risks both at sea and on land please contact the ARX OpenBridge Team openbridge@arxmaritime.com



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- (1) It is worth noting that for the sake of argument the recent missile attacks that have taken near Yemen are not being classed as acts of common piracy.
- (2) <http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/reports/sop/latin-america#main-content>
- (3) Caribbean Safety and Security Net, "Annual Report 2016 Reported Yacht Crime," <https://www.safetyandsecuritynet.com/5180-2/>
- (4) Gemma Handy, "Yachters Fight Back against Real-life Pirates of the Caribbean," BBC, 15 September 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-lat-in-america-37274708>
- (5) http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/piracy/20180425_WTS.pdf?ver=2018-04-26-161601-310
- (6) http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/piracy/20180425_WTS.pdf?ver=2018-04-26-161601-310
- (7) http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/piracy/20180502_WTS.pdf?ver=2018-05-04-075037-713
- (8) http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/piracy/20180502_WTS.pdf?ver=2018-05-04-075037-713
- (9) <https://icc-ccs.org/index.php/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-report/details/172/1621>
- (10) <https://icc-ccs.org/index.php/piracy-reporting-centre/live-piracy-report/details/172/1620>
- (11) http://www.oni.navy.mil/Portals/12/Intel%20agencies/piracy/20180509_WTS.pdf?ver=2018-05-11-071018-067
- (12) <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/2018/05/13/focussed-operation-three-arrows-hits-the-mark-in-the-gulf-of-aden/>